DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 238 135 EA 016 229

AUTHOR Wright, Linus
TITLE Policy vs. Administration: The Difference.
PUB DATE 24 Apr 83
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National School Boards Association (San Francisco, CA, April 23-26, 1983).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Board Administrator Relationship; Board of Education Policy; *Board of Education Role; Boards of Education; Elementary Secondary Education; *Interprofessional Relationship; School Administration; *Superintendents

ABSTRACT

To have an efficiently functioning school district, the roles of the school board and the administration must be clearly delineated, so that the school board formulates school policy while the superintendent implements it. To avoid dissention over their respective spheres of authority, it is best for a superintendent to establish two-way communication, be open and honest, be willing and ready to compromise, keep the board informed of all sides of a question, and make certain that the total board knows exactly what is happening. Board members in turn should refrain from requiring irrefutable proof that administrative recommendations have been implemented, asking embarrassing questions at open meetings, surprising the superintendent with issues he is unprepared to discuss, and burdening him with detailed plans for implementation of policy. Above all, it is important that both board and superintendent are assured of the other's support. (Author/TE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

83-542

POLICY VS. ADMINISTRATION: THE DIFFERENCE

9 A.M., APRIL 24, 1983

NSBA CONVENTION, SAN FRANCISCO

MR. LINUS WRIGHT

ED238135

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Linus Wright

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

WHENEVER I THINK OF THE DIFFERENCE PEOPLE PLAY IN VARIOUS ROLES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING THEM, I IMMEDIATELY THINK ABOUT THE HUMAN BODY. CAN YOU IMAGINE, FOR EXAMPLE, THE CHAOS THAT WOULD RESULT IF ONE MORNING YOUR EAR DECIDED IT WAS TIRED OF BEING AN EAR AND, INSTEAD, WAS GOING TO DO YOUR SEEING FOR YOU THAT DAY. AND THEN YOUR EYE--NOT LIKING TO BE SHOVED ASIDE--WOULD DECIDE WELL, IT WOULD JUST SHOW YOU AND BECOME YOUR TONGUE AND DO ALL THE TALKING. MAYBE IT HASN'T LIKED WHAT YOUR TONGUE'S BEEN SAYING FOR QUITE SOME TIME ANYWAY. WELL, TO SAY THE LEAST, YOU WOULD HAVE A VERY UNUSUAL DAY, BUMPING INTO THINGS AND CERTAINLY NOT BEING VERY WELL UNDERSTOOD.

EA 016 229

THAT SAME KIND OF CONFUSION CAN RESULT WHEN A SCHOOL BOARD AND SUPERINTENDENT DON'T UNDERSTAND EXACTLY WHAT THEIR FUNCTIONS ARE OR--EVEN IF THEY DO--DECIDE THE OTHER ONE ISN'T DOING THE JOB RIGHT AND DECIDE TO TRY TO TAKE OVER THE OTHER'S RESPONSIBILITIES. NOT ONLY IS CONFUSION THE END RESULT, BUT ALSO--IN ALL LIKELIHOOD--SOME IMPORTANT TASKS ARE GOING TO BE LEFT UNDONE.

EVEN WORSE, THE RESULTING CONFUSION WILL SPAWN A LESSENING OF RESPECT FOR AND CONFIDENCE IN NOT ONLY THE INDIVIDUALS WHO FILL THOSE ROLES, BUT THE SCHOOL DISTRICT ITSELF AND PUBLIC EDUCATION IN GENERAL.

PRESENTING A UNITED FRONT BECOMES MORE AND MORE IMPORTANT CONSIDERING THE MAJOR CHALLENGES PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE FACING TODAY. THERE ARE GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS WHO WELCOME ANY OBVIOUS LACK OF UNITY OF POSITION OR DISHARMONY TO DRIVE WEDGES AND DIVIDE AND CONQUER--MUCH AS A SMALL CHILD WILL DO WITH PARENTS WHO DO NOT STAND FIRMLY AS ONE.

IT'S ONE THING TO SAY THAT THE BOARD SETS POLICY AND THE SUPERINTENDENT IMPLEMENTS IT. OF COURSE, WE ALL KNOW THAT'S THE WAY IT SHOULD BE. BUT IT'S ANOTHER THING FOR EVERYONE CONCERNED TO REALLY AGREE ON WHAT THAT STATEMENT REALLY MEANS IN THE NITTY-GRITTY OF DAY-TO-DAY OCCURRENCES. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE WHEN YOU CONSIDER THAT THE PLAYERS CHANGE PERIODICALLY, AND EVERYONE HAS TO START OVER IN ESTABLISHING WORKING RELATIONSHIPS AND GROUND RULES.

PERIODIC STUDIES SINCE 1895 HAVE SHOWN THAT CONFLICT OVER WHICH PARTY ESTABLISHED POLICY AND WHICH PARTY EXECUTED POLICY CONTINUE TO EXIST BETWEEN SCHOOL BOARDS AND SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS. IN THE MASSACHUSETTS STUDY OF THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENCY BY GROSS, MASON AND McEACHERIN, THIS AREA SURFACED AS THE MAJOR CONFLICT BETWEEN THE SCHOOL BOARD CHAIRMAN AND THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT. THE SUPERINTENDENT'S MAIN COMPLAINT WAS THAT THE SCHOOL BOARD DEPARTED FROM ITS ROLE OF POLICY FORMULATION AND ASSUMED EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM. CONVERSELY, THE SUPERINTENDENT WAS PERCEIVED BY THE SCHOOL BOARD CHAIRMAN AS INTRUDING INTO THE FIELD OF MAKING SCHOOL POLICY.

OF COURSE, THE FIRST STEP--IN MY OPINION--TOWARD ESTABLISHING APPROPRIATE AND WORKABLE PARAMETERS IS LAYING

A FIRM FOUNDATION OF MUTUAL TRUST AND RESPECT. AND--

SOMETIMES MORE THAN OTHERS--TAKES TIME AND EFFORT.

BASICALLY THERE ARE FIVE STEPS.

1. ONE IS ESTABLISHING TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION.

2. SECOND, IS BEING OPEN AND HONEST. TELL IT LIKE IT IS--BUT WITH TACT AND GOOD WILL.

3. THIRD IS BEING WILLING AND READY TO COMPROMISE... TO SEE SITUATIONS THROUGH THE OTHER PERSON'S EYES.

4. FOURTH IS KEEPING THE BOARD INFORMED OF ALL SIDES OF A QUESTION AND NOT WITHHOLDING INFORMATION WHICH MIGHT GO AGAINST A PARTICULAR POINT OF VIEW. I DON'T KNOW OF A SURER WAY TO DESTROY CONFIDENCE THAN FOR A BOARD MEMBER TO FIND OUT ACCIDENTALLY THAT THE SUPERINTENDENT DID NOT PRESENT THE TOTAL PICTURE.

5. FIFTH TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT THE TOTAL BOARD KNOWS WHAT IS GOING ON. THIS MEANS TO BE VERY CAREFUL TO SEND ALL COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TO ALL MEMBERS ON A CONSISTENT BASIS. OTHERWISE, YOU'RE ASKING FOR AND HELPING TO CREATE FACTIONS AND DISTRUST.

ONCE MUTUTAL TRUST AND RESPECT ARE SOLIDLY ESTABLISHED, YOU CAN MOVE ON TO DEFINING RESPECTIVE RESPONSIBILITIES. AS A SUPERINTENDENT, I NEED TO KNOW WHAT DECISIONS THEY GIVE ME TO MAKE ON MY OWN, WHAT DECISIONS I NEED TO MAKE--BUT KEEP THEM VERY CAREFULLY INFORMED ABOUT AND WHAT DECISIONS I NEED TO HAVE THEIR APPROVAL ON, AND WHAT DECISIONS NEED TO BE MADE IN MUTUAL AGREEMENT. AND SOMETIMES, THERE'S A RATHER FINE LINE BETWEEN THEM.

ON THE OTHER HAND, I'M IN A POSITION TO KNOW WHERE A NEW OR REVISED POLICY IS NEEDED. AND CERTAINLY, I BELIEVE I WOULD BE DERELICT IN MY DUTY IF I DID NOT RECOMMEND WHAT THAT POLICY SHOULD BE, THE IMPLICATIONS AND POSSIBLE RESULTS.

OF COURSE, ONE THING THAT HELPS ME AS A SUPERINTENDENT IS KEEPING IN MIND THAT THE BOARD MEMBER'S RESPONSIBILITY IS TO THE ELECTORATE, WHILE MY RESPONSIBILITY IS TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION. OF COURSE, IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT I FEEL A RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PEOPLE AS WELL, BUT, WHEN YOU COME RIGHT DOWN TO IT, THE BOARD OF EDUCATION IS MY BOSS. THE BOARD EVALUATES MY PERFORMANCE AND HAS THE AUTHORITY TO KEEP ME OR GIVE ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO LOOK FOR EMPLOYMENT ELSEWHERE. SO MY RESPONSIBILITY IS TO THE BOARD.

AS A SUPERINTENDENT I MUST BE UNBENDING UNDER THE PRESSURES OF THE MANY FORCES THAT SURROUND THE ISSUES OF THE DAY. AND, AS YOU WELL KNOW, THOSE PRESSURES SEEM TO BE MOUNTING--WHAT WITH THE BROADENING DIVERSITY OF CULTURES AND VIEWPOINTS IN OUR COMMUNITIES. I FIND BEING UNBENDING AND, SOMETIMES, COURAGEOUS IS NOT THAT DIFFICULT SINCE I KNOW I HAVE THE BACKING OF MY BOARD. AS LONG AS I SPEAK IN KEEPING WITH BOARD POLICY, I'M ON SURE FOOTING IN SAFE TERRITORY, KNOWING THEY'LL STAND BEHIND ME.

WHILE KEEPING IN MIND WHOM I'M RESPONSIBLE TO HELPS ME AS A SUPERINTENDENT, I HAVE ONE OF EQUAL VALUE FOR BOARD MEMBERS. THAT IS TO KEEP IN MIND THAT THEY HAVE ONLY ONE EMPLOYEE. AND THAT'S THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. ALL THE OTHERS ARE MIND. THAT ONE CONCEPT HELPS TO CLEAR UP

A LOT OF POTENTIAL PROBLEM SPOTS WHEN A CITIZEN BENDS THEIR EAR ABOUT A PARTICULAR PRINCIPAL OR TEACHER.

ANOTHER THING THAT'S HELPED US IN DALLAS IS THE FACT THAT THE BOARD OF EDUCATION HAS SET BROAD-BASED GOALS THE LAST TWO DECADES. WE HAD THE SEVEN STEPS FOR THE 70s, AND NOW IT'S TARGETS FOR THE 80s. EACH YEAR, THE BOARD TAKES THE DECADE GOALS AND NARROWS THEM DOWN AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR FOR THAT PARTICULAR YEAR. AS A SUPERINTENDENT, THIS GIVES ME SOUND DIRECTION FOR WHERE THE BOARD WANTS TO GO--BUT THE SPECIFICS OF HOW TO REACH THOSE GOALS OR TARGETS ARE MY RESPONSIBILITY.

I'D LIKE TO MENTION BRIEFLY FOUR APPROACHES THAT A BOARD CAN TAKE TO GUARANTEE A SUPERINTENDENT WILL HAVE SLEEPLESS NIGHTS.

1. TO DEMAND IRREFUTABLE PROOF FOR EVERY ADMINISTRATIVE RECOMMENDATION.

2. TO ASK THE SUPERINTENDENT EMBARRASSING QUESTIONS AT AN OPEN BOARD MEETING WITH TV CAMERAS ROLLING.

3. TO SURPRISE THE SUPERINTENDENT AT A BOARD MEETING WITH RESOLUTIONS, TOPICS OR ISSUES HE MAY OR MAY NOT BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS.

4. TO GIVE THE SUPERINTENDENT DETAILED PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING A SCHOOL BOARD POLICY OR DECISION.

ON THE OTHER HAND, I THINK IT IS OF ABSOLUTE IMPORTANCE THAT THE SUPERINTENDENT PUBLICLY AND IN ACTION SUPPORT THE DECISION OF THE BOARD IN ALL MATTERS--REGARDLESS OF HOW HE MAY PERSONALLY FEEL ABOUT A PARTICULAR DECISION.

WHEN YOU GET RIGHT DOWN TO IT, WE'RE TALKING ABOUT THE TWO R'S--ROLE AND RELATIONSHIP. NOTHING COULD BE MORE IMPORTANT IN UNITEDLY LEADING A SCHOOL DISTRICT. CAMPBELL, CUNNINGHAM AND McPHEE PUT IT WELL IN THEIR BOOK, THE ORGANIZATION AND CONTROL OF AMERICAN SCHOOLS.

"THE BUSINESS OF RUNNING THE SCHOOLS IS SO SERIOUS THAT NEITHER BOARD MEMBERS NOR ADMINISTRATORS CAN AFFORD TO ALLOW THIS RELATIONSHIP TO DETERIORATE. IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT EACH TRY HARD TO MAINTAIN AN ACCEPTABLE LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE IN THE FULFILLMENT OF HIS RESPONSIBILITIES."

AND WHEN BOARD MEMBERS AND SUPERINTENDENTS DO THAT THEY ARE THE WINNERS...SO IS THE COMMUNITY....SO ARE THE KIDS.